

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Easter 7 – May 16th, 2010

Acts 16:6-10

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have no record of this, but as one who certainly knew the Scriptures, we can imagine the Apostle Paul found a great deal of comfort in the Old Testament Book of Esther. Are you familiar with it? It is memorable for a couple of reasons. The first, more of a curiosity than anything else, is this: nowhere in the book is the proper name “God” ever mentioned. He is certainly assumed and alluded to, but as a book of the Bible that doesn't mention the name of God, Esther is unique.

The second (and more important) reason it is memorable is the great spiritual lesson it contains. Through the story of Esther – a young Jewish woman who through a series of events becomes queen to a Persian King and uses her position to save her people from destruction – we are provided with a wonderful and striking illustration of how God orchestrates events and puts ordinary people in places for His purposes. Perhaps the best known passage that comes from this book is the encouragement Esther receives from her uncle Mordechai. After he alerts her to the plot an evil man has put into place to destroy her countrymen, he suggests it was no accident she was where she was by asking the question: **“And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”** (Esther 4:14).

“For such a time as this.” One of the great blessings of being a Christian is knowing that God has made us who we are and placed us where we are on purpose, as opposed to chance. While other people wrestle with the big philosophical questions like who am I and how did I get here, we don't. We know that God in His grace and wisdom has placed us where we are **“for such a time as this.”**

That's why we can imagine the Apostle Paul found great comfort in the message of Esther. Through three great missionary journeys, often not knowing what he was going to find or where he would be heading next, Paul was comfortable letting the Holy Spirit give him directions. He was undoubtedly confident that he wasn't just wandering aimlessly, trusting that God had chosen not only his vocation, but also his every location.

Our text for today is an indication of this. It is a small snapshot of Paul's second missionary journey. It gives us an idea of how such journeys played themselves out and reads almost like a travelogue. It ends with an event that is far more significant and personal to us than we might at first think – an event we call Paul's Macedonian call. We'd like to talk about that, and in the process superimpose this event onto each of our lives. We can then draw the conclusion that in a way similar to Paul

Theme: Each One Of Us Has A Macedonian Call.

- 1. God is directing us**
- 2. May God lead us to listen to him**

If you are a detail person or like to plan ahead or don't do well with sudden changes in plans, you probably wouldn't have liked traveling with the Apostle Paul on any of his missionary journeys. Listen again to our text: **Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.**

A little background will be helpful. As mentioned a moment ago, our text is a part of Paul's second missionary journey. It lasted approximately three years. The original intent was to revisit and strengthen the Christian churches he had started on his first journey, but after doing that, he followed God's leading to new and different places. It is interesting to note that Paul had certain specific locations in mind where he thought it would be good to do mission work, but obviously the Lord had other ideas. He is denied access to certain areas and eventually finds himself in a harbor town named Troas (in present day Turkey). There the Lord spoke to him through a vision. Paul saw a man from **Macedonia** asking him to come and help the people over there.

The help those people needed was not monetary or physical. It was spiritual. These people – like all people – needed to hear the Gospel. They needed to hear the message of sin and grace and God's solution to mankind's damnable dilemma in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They had plenty of gods over there, but they knew something was missing. That "something" was Jesus. So just like Abraham had done centuries before, Paul and his traveling companions made plans to follow the Lord's leading. The verses which follow our text tell us that they boarded a ship and headed for the general region called Macedonia.

After an island stop along the way Paul is going to land in a seaport called Neapolis (today called Kavalla). From there he will make his way north for several miles until he reaches an important and influential city called Philippi. There he would focus his mission activity for a time. We have every reason to believe Paul was confident that God had chosen this location -- that he was where he was **"for such a time as this."** The work would be both spiritually productive and personally challenging. Paul would eventually be thrown into jail there (perhaps you remember the Bible story of "the jailer of Philippi"), but before he left the Lord used him to establish a vibrant and caring Christian congregation. Paul would later write a letter to this congregation which we know as the New Testament book of "Philippians."

But this is really more than just a lesson in Bible history. Here's where it gets personal. Macedonia was in the country of Greece, and Greece is part of Europe. What we have here, then, is the Gospel being preached on European soil for the first time. The point: Anyone with a European background (and that's most of us in this congregation) must praise God for His mission-mindedness, because such mission-mindedness years ago has had a direct impact upon us today. As we reflect on this text, let us first of all thank God for using Paul to proclaim the Gospel to our forefathers, and through them, to us.

2. May God lead us to listen to him

Then we need to take this information to the next step: *Through us, to others.* To this end, as we retrace Paul's steps, his willingness to be used by God, and his confidence that God had him exactly where He wanted him, there are some important lessons we can learn and apply to our lives as God's people today. The theme for this sermon is "Each of Us Has a Macedonian Call." What's that supposed to mean?

It doesn't mean we should expect God to appear to us in a vision as He did to Paul. Rather it means as God's people – God's salt and God's light – we can go forward in life with the confidence that He has placed us in specific times and circumstances to do His bidding, just as He did Paul. We don't have to ever feel we are not being given the opportunity to serve, because we are. We are to "bloom where we are planted."

What I'm saying is this: while the Macedonia of our text was a geographical location, in a broad, symbolic sense we can let it represent *anywhere* people are in spiritual distress and need to hear the Gospel. In that sense, *each one of us lives in our own personal Macedonia.* We're each located in our own personal

mission field. It's important to simply recognize this as a fact. What is also important is that we recognize our *responsibility* within that field.

Each of us comes into contact with any number of people every day or in the course of the week. Some of them we'll know by name, others we won't. Some of them are fellow Christians, others are not. But whether these acquaintances are casual or formal, fleeting or long-standing, we serve as Christ's witnesses before those He has put in the path of our lives. The reality is every day we rub shoulders with people – Christians and non-Christians alike – who are formulating, evaluating or reevaluating their view of Christianity by what they see in Christians. This is not meant to make us feel guilty or pressured or stressed by the idea that “this is just one more thing to do.” It is to simply remind us that to be a Christian is to exercise a calling. And that is a privilege. We have the privilege of representing Jesus Christ before a watching world. We may not have the *specific* calling or capabilities of the Apostle Paul, but we are no less God's missionaries. Again, it's just important that we remember that.

So the question we want to be asking of ourselves is this: given the high privilege of representing Christ in our own personal Macedonia, how can we be the best we can be to the glory of God? The answer is really quite simple. The key to representing Christ well is not so much a case of *doing* as it is first a case of *being*. While it is important that we are always learning and educating ourselves, truly effective witnessing for Christ comes not by mastering certain truths, but by letting certain truths master us. And this happens naturally as we personally drink deeply from the well of God's Word and sacrament.

As the Apostle Paul encouraged the Colossian Christians, so he encourages us: **“Let the word of God dwell in you richly.”** As we do, and as those in our mission field see the comforting, steadying effect God's Word has on those who call themselves His children, it just may be that they will be drawn to ask what it is that makes us who and what we are. And then we have the opportunity to proclaim His Name.

We began this sermon with the conjecture that the Book of Esther may have provided Paul with some comfort and strength as he labored in his mission field. It may have given him the assurance that he was indeed doing God's work at the exact place and time God wanted. Even when he went into new places like Macedonia. As we consider our lives as Christians, perhaps the greatest lesson we can derive from this text is to view ourselves a little differently.

As you leave the parking lot, what do the little signs by each driveway say? They say: “You are now entering your mission field.” Or to put it as we did earlier: We all have our personal Macedonian call. May God empower us to be *in* Christ so that through our example – which may then lead to the opportunity to speak the Gospel – we can *share* Christ with a world that desperately needs Him. Because each of us, like Paul, are God's agents when and where we are **“for such a time as this.”** Amen.